

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3216

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK IMMEDIATE

USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 12327

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT CORRECTED)

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, HK

SUBJ: VIETNAMESE REFUGEES ON "AMERICAN MOHAWK"

REF: STATE 224908

1. WE CALLED ON ACTING POLITICAL ADVISOR ORR AND PRESENTED DEMARCHE ALONG LINES PARA 4 REFTEL. ORR SAID THAT OUR PRESENTATION WOULD BE CONSIDERED, BUT HE HELD OUT VIRTUALLY NO HOPE THAT THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT WOULD REVERSE ITS DECISION NOT TO ALLOW LANDING OF REFUGEES ABOARD "AMERICAN MOHAWK". ORR SAID THAT OUR PROFERRED GUARANTEE WAS NOT SUFFICIENT TO OVERCOME HONG KONG'S CONCERN THAT DEPARTURE FROM ITS PRINCIPLE OF ACCEPTING FIRST-PORT-OF-CALL REFUGEES WOULD ENCOURAGE OTHER SHIPS WITH REFUGEES TO DIVERT TO HONG KONG. HKG BELIEVED ONCE AN EXCEPTION IS MADE, SHIP AGENTS WILL BE AWARE OF IT, AND THERE WILL BE SIMILAR CASES IN FUTURE.

2. ORR SAID THAT WHILE THE HKG HAD ACCEPTED GUARANTEES

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IN TWO CASES WHERE SHIPS (NORWEGIAN AND U.K.) HAD DIVERTED TO HONG KONG WITH REFUGEES, IN BOTH THESE INSTANCES IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE SHIPS COULD NOT SAFELY CARRY THESE REFUGEES TO AN ONWARD DESTINATION. MOREOVER, THE GUARANTEES ENTAILED A TRANSIT PASSAGE OF NO MORE THAN A FEW DAYS IN HONG KONG. NEITHER OF THESE FACTORS APPLIED IN THE PRESENT CASE.

THE HKG MARITIME DEPARTMENT HAD DETERMINED THAT TWITH
THE PURCHASES OF LIFESAVING EQUIPMENT, THE "AMERICAN
MOHAWK" COULD SAFELY CARRY THE REFUGEES TO BANGKOK.

3. ORR NOTED THAT THE VISITING UNHCR REP.
SAMPATKUMAR, SUPPORTED THE HKG'S DECISION TO STICK
BY THE "FRIST-PORT-OF-CALL" PRINCIPLE AND THAT THIS
HAD STRENGTHENED THE GOVERNMENT'S RESOLVE TO MAINTAIN
ITS NEGATIVE STANCE. HE TURNED ASIDE OUR OFFER TO
EXERT ALL POSSIBLE INFLUENCE ON UNHCR AND THE MACAU
GOVERNMENT TO GET THE "MOHAWK" REFUGEES MOVED TO
MACAU AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE WITH THE OBSERVATION
THAT THIS WOULD ONLY PREEMPT PLACES THERE URGENTLY
NEEDED TO RELIEVE EXISTING CONGESTION IN HONG KONG.

4. ORR CONCLUDED BY NOTING HE WOULD BE IN TOUCH
WITH LONDON BY TELEPHONE, AND IF LONDON AND
BRITISH EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON BELIEVE HKG SHOULD
LAND THESE REFUGEES THEY WOULD HAVE TO MAKE A STRONG
CASE.

5. FOLLOWING MEETING WITH ORR, WE MADE SIMILAR
PRESENTATION TO SAMPATKUMAR, REQUESTING HIM TO SUP-
PORT CONGEN IN ITS STANCE WITH HKG. HE FIRST DEMURRED,
STATING GIVEN HONG KONG'S LIBERAL REFUGEE ACCEPTANCE
POLICY ONE SHOULD NOT FIGHT THIS CASE AND THAT WITH HIGH
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COMMISSIONER'S PRESENT VISIT TO THAILAND, AUTHORITIES
THERE SHOULD BE WILLING LAND THESE REFUGEES AGAINST
GUARANTEE USG WOULD FIND ACCEPTABLE. AT
THE CONSLUSION, HE BACKED OFF SOMEWHAT, NOTING THAT HE
WOULD NOT COMMIT HIMSELF TO A POSITION ON "AMERICAN
MOHAWK" IN HONG KONG. SINCE HE WAS LEAVING HONG KONG
AFTERNOON SEPT 6, HE ASKED THAT WE KEEP CARPENTER
FULLY INFORMED.

6. COMMENT: OUR ONLY HOPE NOW APPEARS TO BE STRONG
PRESSURE FROM LONDON TO REVERSE THE HKG'S POSITION.
OUR CAUSE HAS NOT BEE HELPED BY UNHCR REPS HERE WHO
HAVE ALSO TOLD HKG THAT UNHCR WOULD WORK TO
FACILIATATE THAI ACCEPTANCE OF THESE REFUGEES.
SHOESMITH

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